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July 2007

Volume 20 Number 07

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**HUB**

DIGITAL

LIVING

# The Digital Summer

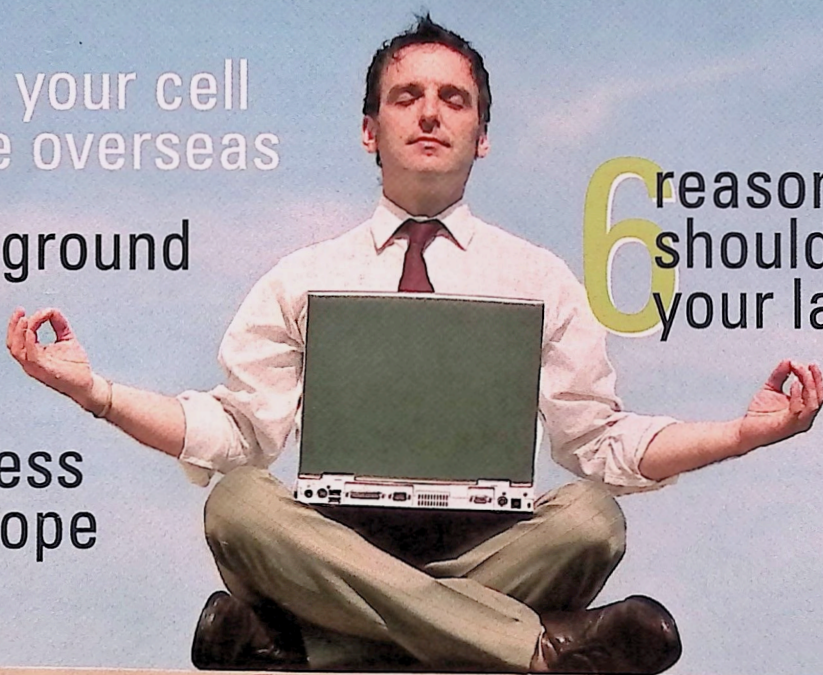
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MSRP: CAD \$2,029

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# Editorial



Taking a vacation from the technosphere

Most of us take vacation time in the summer, and whether it involves an airline flight halfway around the globe or just a short jaunt to escape the city, we look forward to getting away from the daily routine. But can we escape from technology

- and should we even try?

The lowly computer has always had two faces: the business/work/serious face and the fun/hobbyist/creative face. Today, it's not just workaholics fearful of missing a single crucial corporate email who carry laptops on vacation. There's also a growing group of people for whom the digital lifestyle - and all the devices that entails - is the normal order of things. They don't want to turn off the fun and entertainment that the PC puts in their face; rather they want to enhance and enrich holiday time with that same information smorgasbord. It's not surprising that notebook computers have been selling much more briskly than desktop machines - they fit right into the compute anywhere digital lifestyle.

That goes for other digital tools that used to be primarily business focussed, like cellular phones and PDAs. There are still dead zones where your phone stops working if you venture far enough into cottage country (and thank goodness for that, many would say); but on the other hand, how many people that you know have a cell phone primarily for emergencies - in case the car breaks down. Moreover, the cell phone isn't just a phone any more, but

a mini entertainment centre on which you can play games, listen to music and even watch movies. And with fast digital networks, texting and limited web browsing are becoming commonplace activities.

My first Blackberry was the quintessential business tool. Nothing about it was fun or entertaining, apart from the sheer novelty of the device itself. Today, RIM markets them to all segments, and besides basic black, you can get models in an assortment of colours. Like other smart phones, today's Berries are equipped with music and video players, games and socializing tools like Google Talk and Yahoo Messenger preloaded.

Computing and digital technology isn't just about business any more. The technosphere has become part of our atmosphere, surrounding us, nourishing us, an invisible but necessary part of our daily lives. It's more familiar and comforting, especially to urbanites, than the great wilderness we often seek to escape to.

But let's get back to that "breaking out of the daily routine" aspect of vacations that make them so refreshing. Just because you can lead a comfortable existence online, even on vacation, should you? One of the best times I've had in recent years was to take part in a modern cattle drive (using quads, not horses). Being out on the open range with hundreds of cattle trudging out to the horizon line is an experience you could never replicate online. But of course if you forgot that, maybe it is time to push away from that cubicle and cut the digital cord for a while. Trust me, it will all be waiting for you when you get back.

Enjoy the issue,

David Tanaka

Editor-in-Chief

## Contents

July 2007

In selected regions and online:

Photo geotagging .....

Battery, uninterrupted .....

Calling home a foreign concept .....

More than a GPS .....

Online vacation planning .....

Good-bye travel agent, hello traveller network ....

Wireless camping .....

A laptop on vacation? .....

Wi-Fi in Europe .....

Share the journey .....

Eye Candy .....

Bland bugs and boring buccaneers .....

...and more

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DIGITAL LIVING

Volume 20 : Number 07

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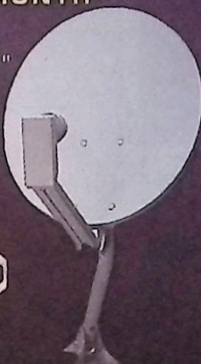
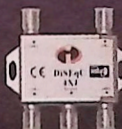
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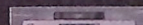
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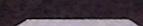
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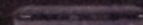
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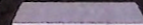
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# Photo geotagging

I have hundreds of great trip photographs, but I don't remember where I took most of them. Sure I have a general idea, but as "taken last week" drifts into "taken last decade," the accuracy of location goes from "Port Stanley" to "somewhere on Lake Erie" to "one of the Great Lakes, I think." With all that extra data a digital camera already captures - camera settings, date, etc. - wouldn't it be great if it would also capture where you took the picture? Like when peanut butter met chocolate or ice cream met waffle cone, the pairing of a GPS (global positioning system) device and a digital camera makes a tasty combo. Welcome to the world of photo geotagging.

At its most basic, photo geotagging is the process of identifying where you took a photo with the latitude and longitude location information from a GPS device. You could match photo to GPS coordinates manually by jotting them down whenever you take a picture, but that can quickly become a bookkeeping nightmare and besides, there's a much simpler way - use the track log, sometimes called a bread crumb trail, that many GPS devices can capture as one of their basic functions. You can adjust the logging interval to something like once every 10 seconds, and as you wander about, the GPS takes positional readings every 10 seconds and records them into a log file.

Later, you can see the path you took on the GPS screen, and if it's in an urban area, superimposed on a street map. On some devices, you can also download the log file to your computer.

That log file is one of three essential pieces needed for photo geotagging. Another piece isn't a physical object, but a process - you need to synchronize the clocks on your GPS unit and your digital camera. This is necessary to let the third piece do its magic. This third piece is a software program that matches the time signatures of photo and GPS track points registered in the log file. In other words, if you took a picture of something at 10:52:12 am, the software matches that time stamp with what the GPS coordinates registered at that same moment - or the track point that has the closest time stamp.

From here, the software might write the latitude and longitude information directly into the image file as part of its EXIF header, and thus make it a permanent part of the image's metadata along with aperture, shutter speed, ISO, etc. There are a number of software utilities available, some shareware and some freeware, for both PC and Mac. If you do a search on "geotagging software," you'll have many hits.



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You could stop there, comforted by the knowledge that ten years from now, by simply calling up the EXIF information, you'd know precisely where on the planet that photo was taken. Or, you could join the growing community of online photo geotaggers and post your trips online. Last year, Flickr added support for geotagged photos and many thousands of such photos are now posted. You can click on highlighted points of a Yahoo map and see photos taken at those co-ordinates. Flickr now has a special geotagging group devoted to the subject.

Camera suppliers are getting into the act too. Sony Canada has a \$130 unit called the GPSSC1 (sony.ca), but it works only with Sony digital cameras

and camcorders. JOBO (jobo.com) announced a product called the JOBO photoGPS earlier this year. It hasn't hit the market yet, but is a device that fits onto a camera's flash hot shoe. Every time the shutter is fired, the GPS unit logs a track point. JOBO says this method makes synchronization much faster, since the track log contains only points corresponding to the shutter firing.

Another photo-specific GPS product is Gisteq's (gisteq.com) PhotoTrackr (approx. \$140), which includes a small portable GPS unit and mapping software that can be used with Google Maps or Flickr.

By David Tanaka



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# DV or Not DV

## The Black Hole that is widescreen TV

Some people seem to think the universe is filled with black holes, measuring 50 inches or greater on the diagonal.

How are we gonna fill up all those new widescreen flat panel TVs with great digital video content, they ask. It's as if prime time drama, pro sports, late night talk shows and movies galore just won't do. New ideas for video production and delivery are changing the media landscape, and new tools like high definition consumer camcorders, desktop PD editing tools and streaming video sites means that content can come from any direction.

But is digital video ready for prime time? Online video communities continue to gather huge audiences and an ever-expanding catalogue of uploaded content. The ease, speed and comfort with which people can shoot and share digital video today means a new breed of "mediacaster" can not only supplement traditional TV broadcasting and video production techniques, they may actually replace them.

In general, user-generated video and community-created content can now be categorized and searched in real-time, just as – in the old days – people flipped through a TV guide. Today, viewers can get their favourite content delivered to them via RSS feeds, a type of subscription service that can either distribute or find videos by content, topic or interest.

In specific, companies like Apple are sure doing their best to change our viewing habits: with products like Apple TV, we can now wirelessly stream free videos directly from YouTube and watch them on our widescreen TVs in the comfort of our living rooms. With available 160GB hard drive options, we can save a couple hundred hours of video on our Apple TV based on 640x480 iTunes video content.

Of course, it might be cellphone'd video, so it could really be 320x178 or something. That looks great on a widescreen HDTV, rated at 1920x1080 – ha ha!

Hence the question, is digital video ready for prime time?

In the last episode of DV or Not DV, for example, yet another high definition digital video format was discussed (AVCHD), along with new tools to create content using the highly compressed format. But we know that not all DV tech specs and HD formats are compatible, and there are hassles when moving from one format to another. Artifacts, pixilation or blockiness, stair-stepping, concatenation and more are among the nasty terms we use to describe what can happen to your video.

If everyone who uploads a video to YouTube, MySpace, Studio V or Blogtv.ca

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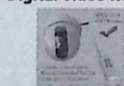
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uses an HD camcorder, fine – once such sites are ready to host and stream HD content, that is.

In the meantime, there's Eno.

Brian Eno: the 70's era Glam rocker, the 90's-period soundtrack composer and now, the 21st Century ambient artist behind something called 77 Million Paintings. It's part of a new trend that sees television viewing as a "background" activity, not a "foreground" one. Some TV you have to watch from start to finish; it demands your attention and you sit there obediently – that's foreground video. Background video is like art on a wall – it contributes to the background ambience of a given environment. You can watch or not as you see fit; you can start and stop whenever you like.

Eno's digital animation and video-based work, which premiered this summer in North America, is a never-ending cycle of hand painted images, randomly selected and transposed by custom software, displayed on multiple flat panel monitors. 77 Million Paintings was created, he explains, "to bring art to the increasing number of flat panel TV's and monitors that often sit darkened and underutilized."

And if the screen in your living room is one such black hole, you can purchase a DVD of 77 Million Paintings, so as to make better use of your widescreen wasteland. The ambient nature of a media viewing experience does open up whole new realms of what can be called electronic cinema.

Video producers and content creators have more choices about the nature of their production, in part because large high-resolution flat-screen displays are opening up a whole new world of creative and business opportunity.

At Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, BC, such opportunities are the stuff of serious research and academic discussion. "If you are five feet away from a four foot wide HD screen, is it TV...or is it IMAX?" Assistant Professor of Interactive Arts Jim Bizzocchi poses what seems at first like a humorous, hypothetical question. But on second thought, his scenario reflects today's reality in many living rooms – and across the industry.

Our video consciousness is changing, and we are adopting and embracing new forms of video: nonlinear versus linear; atmospheric versus narrative; short-form versus theatrical; customer-generated versus committee-created; small screen versus widescreen; fixed location versus portable media, the list goes on.

There are so many new ways of creating and consuming digital video, it's like getting sucked up in a giant black hole.

By Lee Rickwood

Lee Rickwood is a freelance writer and independent video producer. He operates Word On A Wire, an independent company providing editorial, media production and consulting services to individuals and companies across North America. He can be reached at videodaze@goodmedia.com.

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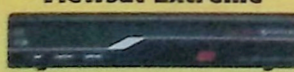


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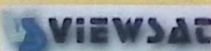
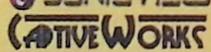
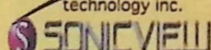
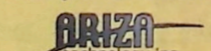
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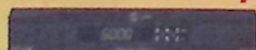
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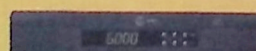
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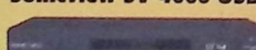
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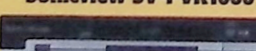
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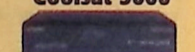
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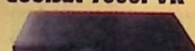
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# Battery, uninterrupted

## Six ways to extend your laptop battery life

It's happened to many a traveller: you're onboard a flight from, say, Vancouver to Toronto, with plans to finish the stack of work tucked into your laptop case. After all, an airplane is often a great place to be productive, thanks to the absence of nagging colleagues, email and ringing phones – providing, of course, the technology you need is in working order at 30,000 feet.

Sometimes, you barely make it over Winnipeg before your computer warns you it's about to "hibernate" as your battery power is at just five percent. Now how exactly do you plan to finish that sales report before you land?

Energy management has been a problem since the earliest days of mobile computing. Thanks to more powerful batteries and processors with better energy management, it's getting better all the time, though there's still no magic-bullet solution.

But there are some things you can do aside from lugging a spare battery. The following are a few tips for squeezing more juice out of your laptop:

**1.** Turn down the brightness of your monitor a great deal as it will help preserve battery life. This can usually be found on your laptop's secondary keyboard commands (such as blue icons that look like little suns) and then manually reducing the brightness. When you're near an electrical outlet again – at home, the office or in a hotel – crank the brightness back up, if

you like. If you're shopping for a new laptop, keep in mind the bigger the laptop screen, the faster the battery drain, in most cases.

**2.** The battery will drain faster if there's a spinning disc in your CD-ROM or DVD-ROM drive such as a game, music CD or DVD movie. Some games offer you the choice to install it all to the hard drive, so choose this option as you'll get more life out of your laptop. Same with music – copy your favourite tunes to the hard drive instead of spinning the CD. While Hollywood cringes at the idea, there are also many programs that can "rip" your movies to the hard drive. Needless-to-say, your laptop battery will last much longer in programs with little drain on system resources, such as a word processor.

**3.** Make sure you have no devices plugged into the laptop that can be draining its power, such as a Webcam, USB thumb-stick or a wireless PC card. Connected peripherals can be a factor in eating away at battery life, so get used to the touchpad instead of using an external mouse when you're away from an electrical outlet. Ditto for enabling wireless connectivity, such as Bluetooth and Wi-Fi, so be sure these radios are turned off when you don't need them. (They should be turned off in an airplane, anyway!)

**4.** Windows users can also click on Power Options in the Control Panel (which may be under Performance and Maintenance) to manually reduce the power consumption of your laptop. Some may turn off your monitor when not in use for, say, three minutes, but will turn on instantly again when a key is touched. Also, you can set alarms when the battery is about to die (say, at five percent) so you can safely save your information before powering down. If you're in the market for a new laptop, the new dual-core processors from Intel are roughly 40 percent faster than their predecessors, yet about 40 percent more energy efficient, resulting in longer battery life.

**5.** While not cheap, you might want to consider a better battery than the one that shipped with your PC. For example, HP laptops typically ship with a regular six-cell battery that can deliver up to four hours of battery life, depending on the application. But you can choose to buy an eight-cell battery that can last up to 10 hours on a single charge or the current top-of-the-line laptop battery – a 12-cell Smart Lithium-Ion Ultra-Capacity battery – for just under 16 hours of battery life. A 12-cell HP battery costs between \$179 and \$199; this price is comparable to other laptop manufacturers.

**6.** This last tip may sound like a no-brainer for air travellers, but you'd be surprised how many times it's overlooked. If you want to get a jumpstart on your work before taking off, be sure to find an electrical outlet while you're waiting for your flight at the gate, a restaurant, bar or airline lounge. This way, you can juice up your laptop before soaring the friendly skies. Experts used to say you shouldn't recharge a laptop battery unless it's fully drained, but a quick email to four leading computer manufacturers suggests this is old advice – today's laptop batteries can be recharged at any time without hurting the longevity of the battery.

By Marc Saltzman

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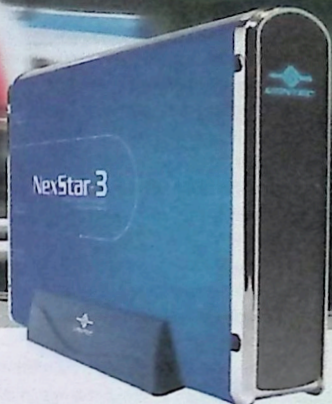
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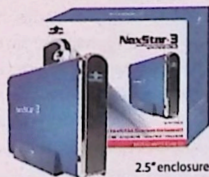


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# Calling home a foreign concept

If I can dump my computer on a table in a café in almost any country in the world and get a wireless connection to the Internet, why can't I pick up my phone and dial home? Mobile communication is great until you try to make a call using your cell phone from a foreign country. It should be simple, but it isn't. So if you're travelling overseas this summer and you want to be able to call home, you'll need to prepare before you leave town. I'll tell you why you're going to encounter problems, explain what those are and what you can do to resolve them.

While most countries use GSM networks, Canadian cellular service providers are split between GSM (Rogers and Fido) and CDMA (Bell Mobility and Telus Mobility) networks. The two aren't compatible and a CDMA phone can't be used overseas. If you use Rogers, you're part way to a solution. Tri-band and quad-band phones used on the GSM network can be used overseas, however if the phone is locked, you'll be locked (excuse the pun) into using the overseas provider that your carrier has a deal with. Most cell phones are locked, so they can only be used with the carrier that sold you the phone. Some companies will unlock them for you if you ask, others won't. If your phone can be unlocked, you have additional (cheaper) options.

Before you head overseas, check what options your cell phone carrier offers in the countries you'll be visiting. Check the cost of calls back to Canada, the cost of local calls in that country and the cost of incoming calls to your phone. Also, if your carrier requires you to implement international roaming, make arrangements to do this before you leave.

If the costs are too high, there are other options available. One is to buy a prepaid phone card either here before you leave or overseas. These cards are freely available in tourist locations, and often in newsagents and post offices. They can be purchased in small denominations and used to make calls home and often local calls in the country too. Of course, this doesn't solve the problem of having a number so others can call you.

If you're travelling for more than a couple of weeks, consider unlocking your GSM phone or purchase an unlocked phone before you leave or when you get to your destination. Then, purchase a local SIM card for the phone – visit [telestial.com](http://telestial.com) to investigate approximate costs. GSM phones operate from a small removable card in the phone called a SIM (Subscriber Identity Module). You can buy a SIM for any country and slip it into your phone. It will give you a local number and you can buy prepaid minutes in local currency. People at home can call you and you can call anyone. Cost is the primary benefit here – the cost of phone calls in just about every country in the world is cheaper than here in Canada (with the exception of the US).

Other options include renting a local phone in the country you are visiting from a local provider – you will have to do this or have a phone if you're travelling to Japan or Korea because their phone systems are different again. Rental companies are located at major airports – simply pick up your phone after you've picked up your luggage and return it at any airport when you leave – all costs will be charged to your credit card.

Skype and your laptop is another option. Using Skype Out minutes, you can make calls anywhere in the world and you can purchase a voicemail box so folks can call you and leave a message – it's not perfect, but it's a lot cheaper than some other solutions.

Remember, regardless of what solution you're using when you're overseas, to dial home you have to dial the country code (1) followed by the area code and then the number. Inside the country, most phones behave like local phones so skip the country code and just dial the area code and number.

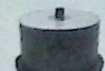
With a little planning, you can not only have a "Bon voyage!" but you can call home and tell everyone about it.

By Helen Bradley

The screenshot shows the Telestial website with a navigation menu on the left including: Getting Started, International Cell Phones, Prepaid SIM Cards, Special Promotions, Additional Airtime, Return-Call Service, Accessories, Satellite Phones, Calling Cards, and CDMA 3G/4G Telestial. The main content area features a 'Travel with a cell phone in your pocket' banner, a 'Get a Phone + Get Service' offer, and a 'Brief Intro to International Cell Phone Use' section.

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# A laptop on vacation?

## Six reasons why you should bring your PC on your next vacation trip

A laptop is an invaluable travel companion for a mobile executive: thousands of "hotspots" in cafes, hotels and airport lounges means you log onto the corporate network when outside of the office, plus you'll be packing your favourite word processing, spreadsheet and presentation software so you can remain productive.

But a growing trend is to bring your laptop on vacation. Yep, this once business-only tool can in fact loosen its tie and be used for entertainment, navigation and communication, among many other applications.

In fact, a recent Intel study found more than 40 percent of those surveyed said they plan on bringing their laptop on their next holiday getaway. And so the following are a half dozen great reasons to do so.

Toothbrush? Check. Swimsuit? Got it. Laptop? Uh huh. Great, here we go:

### 1. Movies and games

Rather than squint to see the airline's cheesy flick – which doesn't pause when you have to go to the bathroom – use your laptop as a portable DVD player so you can watch what you want, when you want and where you want. And with a laptop in tow, you can avoid the need to take a second mortgage out just to order a movie from your hotel room. Don't forget you can also get caught up on your favourite TV shows on DVD or from various download services. Your laptop is also a great gaming platform too, so kids

and kids at heart can also make a long flight a more entertaining one. If you're vacationing by car with kids, your laptop and a stock of your children's favourite DVD movies is also ideal to prevent the constant "Are we there yet?" from the back seat.

### 2. GPS

If you're heading on a family road trip, you don't need to buy a \$500 GPS (Global Positioning System) system for the car when you have a perfectly good laptop. Products such as Microsoft's Streets & Trips 2007 with GPS Locator turns your PC into a navigation system that can not only tell you (and show you) how to get from point A to point B – in a much bigger screen than a regular stand-alone GPS device – but can also tell you nearby points of interest (such as ATMs, hotels, gas stations and restaurants). Keep in mind, however, you'll likely need to pick up a power adaptor for the car to ensure your laptop lasts as long as you need it.

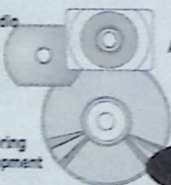
### 3. Keeping in touch

Forget about exuberant roaming fees on your cell phone (and that's assuming your cell phone will work in the country you're in) or stiff long distance rates provided by your hotel – instead, a laptop with a microphone is an inexpensive way to keep in touch with those who matter most with free VoIP software such as Skype, Windows Live Messenger or Yahoo! Messenger. If your laptop doesn't already have one built-in, you can pick up

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a webcam for as low as \$20 and also be seen and heard. Anecdotally, on a recent trip to Shanghai, Skype and a webcam on both my home PC and traveling laptop let me see and hear my wife and kids (and vice-versa), which significantly bridged the distance between us.

#### 4. Music

Considering all of your music resides on your computer nowadays, you can enjoy it wherever you can lug your portable PC, such as in a hotel room, airport or summer cabin. Unlike an iPod and most other portable MP3 players, you don't need to use earphones to hear your favourite tunes while getting ready to go out (or if you like earphones, you can pick up wireless Bluetooth headphones to hear tunes up to 10 metres away). You can also listen to thousands of free streaming radio stations on an Internet-connected laptop, including your hometown favourites. Read about a new album release or audio book in the local newspaper? Download it from your hotel room to listen to on the flight back home.

#### 5. Pictures and video

You probably use a digital camera when on vacation to capture those precious memories. But what do you do when space runs out on a memory card? With a laptop computer, you can easily dump the photos from the camera to the laptop, delete them off the card, and then pop it back into the camera to begin shooting again. In fact, you can immediately upload photos (or video from a camcorder) to your blog, website or Facebook profile. Have a shot of yourself on the beach you really like – except for that greasy guy in the Speedo beside you? No worries – you can crop him out of the photo with editing software before uploading.

#### 6. Info and more

Lastly, your laptop computer – when connected to the Web – is all you need to keep up with world events, download your favourite podcasts, peruse local restaurant menus, double-check the currency exchange or research hours of operation for nearby tourist attractions. Need to change your flight home? No problem, log onto your airline's homepage or travel site and click the mouse a few times to get it done with ease. And if you need to check work email – even though your significant other made you leave the BlackBerry at home – at least you can put out some minor fires at the office while still away with the family.

By Marc Saltzman



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# Wi-Fi in Europe

## Almost there...

If you're planning a trip to Europe and are thinking of using your Wi-Fi enabled laptop to keep in touch with folks back home or pick up your email messages, you shouldn't have many problems except in certain parts of Eastern Europe.

The number of hotspots where you can connect to the Internet, at times free of charge, has spread so rapidly across Western Europe in the past few years that today you are guaranteed Internet access in practically all cities and major towns.

While Britain remains a world leader in terms of Wi-Fi adoption, most Western European countries are now really moving to catch up and face up to the phenomenal popularity of this new means of communication.

Considering the average age of buildings in Europe and the fact that it only cost \$2,000 to set up a Wi-Fi hotspot (with practically no wiring to speak of), hotspots are spreading like mushrooms with a deployment rate of 67 percent since the end of 2004. There are now 122 registered service providers with 147 operations in 29 European countries.

## Free Access? Yes and no!

According to the Irish research site free-hotspot.com, Paris has become the top European city for free wireless Internet access (with more than 80 free hotspots) followed by London, Dublin, Barcelona, Brighton, Munich, Amsterdam, Vienna, Marseille and Cologne. And if you need to know where you can access free hotspots in Europe, go to [wififreespot.com/europe](http://wififreespot.com/europe). But





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most of the time, if you want to use your own computer to access the Internet, you will have to pay.

France now offers 20,000 public hotspots including 3,000 hotels, 92 conference centres, 47 railway stations, 30 airports and more than 5,000 business centres and most of those hotspots are not free.

Take hotels, for instance (and this applies to all other European countries as well). Internet access is generally free as long as you use the hotel computer located in the reception area or in a conference room. But if you wish to use your laptop, Wi-Fi connection in the privacy of your hotel room is a different story. Example: only half the rooms at the Hotel Ibis at Paris Charles de Gaulle airport (Terminal 3) are Wi-Fi covered. Another factor to keep in mind is that Wi-Fi reception varies from room to room and floor to floor. Make sure, when you register, to tell the clerk that you need a room with a good Wi-Fi reception.

There are several ways of paying for your Wi-Fi connection. In some hotels, the reception will give you an access code to enter when your browser detects the wireless connection and you will be charged for the time you use your connection: generally 10 euro for one hour, 15 euro for two hours. In many cases, however, access to the Internet is provided by an Internet service provider, and there are quite a number of them: The Cloud, Orange, Free, to name a few. They offer you packages ranging from an hour to several hours. You may encounter two problems here.

First, the service provider will likely demand a credit card number and, for some odd reason, Canadian credit cards seem to have a hard time registering correctly, particularly in Italy. American Express is often

declined, MasterCard and Visa do not always register and this can lead to some serious aggravation. To avoid this problem, find out in advance who provides Internet service at the hotel where you will be staying. Then you can go to the site of the operator and buy a package online. You will get an access code that will get you on the Internet the moment the network is detected by your laptop. You can also buy time on the Internet by purchasing a card at newspaper stands or, at times, at the reception desk in the hotel. That card will also provide you with the access code you need.

The second problem is that packages from one service provider aren't honoured by another, so if you only used one hour of your allotted time and move to another hotel with a different provider, you're just out of luck. You have to buy another package.

Wi-Fi enabled laptops purchased in Canada generally work well in Europe. But, it may happen that the card you're using does not cover some of the wireless channels used across the Atlantic. Most hotspots and Wi-Fi freespots in Europe are equipped with 802.11b access points, but some may offer 802.11a or 802.11g and you may need to purchase an adapter card [35-90 euro].

By André Salwyn



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## More than a GPS

Having escaped from its utilitarian role as a field tool for earth science types, the Global Positioning System or GPS unit, is popping up everywhere as a consumer gadget. Plus, the single purpose units of the past few generations are being joined by multipurpose units that incorporate the functions of other portable devices. HUB:DL had the opportunity to evaluate two such products.

The Pharos Traveler GPS 525 is a Windows Mobile PDA, while the Blackberry 8800 is an EDGE-capable cellular phone and Blackberry messaging device. What distinguishes these particular models is that they also include a GPS receiver and mapping software.

### Pharos Traveler GPS 525

GPS units from Pharos Science and Applications ([www.pharosgps.com](http://www.pharosgps.com)) are not as well known as brands like Garmin or Tom Tom, but they've been in the game for a while. Some Microsoft Streets and Maps products include a GPS add-on that comes from Pharos and can be used with Windows notebooks and Windows PDAs. A few years ago, HUB tested a Pharos unit that plugged into the CompactFlash slot. We used it with an early generation Windows CE

handheld. The evolutionary path for that two-part solution leads us to the Traveler GPS 525.

When the unit initially boots up, the splash screen reads HTC Innovation. HTC, or the High Tech Computer Corporation, is a 10 year-old Taiwanese manufacturer that makes handhelds, cellular phones, etc. The unit is powered by a 300 Mhz Samsung SC32442 integrated processor plus memory chip, and runs on Windows Mobile 5.1 operating system. The device has 96MB of RAM dedicated to data storage and 48MB set aside for program use, plus an SD card slot. It also has two wireless radios – for 802.11g and Bluetooth.

Because this is, at its heart, a Windows Mobile handheld, you can expect all the functions associated with this platform. You have access to mobile versions of MS Word, Excel, Powerpoint, Internet Explorer, Outlook (email, calendar, contacts, to-do) and Windows Media.

What you won't see on other Windows Mobile devices is the Ostia icon. (Ostia is the brand name Pharos uses for its navigation software.) When you click it, the GPS interface is launched and from this point, you have a GPS unit in your hands. You can plot and track routes and it will give you turn-by-

turn directions to your destination (including a voice directions feature that you can turn on or off). A dedicated key on the handheld lets you page through map view, satellite view (shows how many satellites it is detecting and which ones it is using) and compass view. The compass view has a rotary compass dial with a centre readout that gives angle in degrees. A text panel below the compass dial shows latitude, longitude, altitude, time, speed and distance.

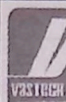
Pharos provided us with maps on a two gigabyte SD card. This was enough capacity to hold all of the maps for Canada and the U.S., as well as a large part of France (with 113MB still free on the card).

As an in-car navigation system, the unit works quite well, but isn't as neat and tidy as a built-in unit. Pharos includes a power adapter that plugs into a car's cigarette lighter/accessory socket along with a cradle with a flexible neck and a suction cup on the other end that you can attach to a car window. The power adapter is very handy if you want to use the Pharos device as an in-car navigation system because you'd want the GPS to be always on, and you need the backlighting set to maximum in order to see the screen in bright sunlight – both of which are hard on battery life. However, they do add clutter to the cabin.

The screen is good, although it tends to wash out in direct sunlight. It is touch sensitive, which makes it easy to zoom in or out on a map just by moving the stylus or even your fingertip up or down across the screen. You can set the map to flat or bird's eye (3D) view, and also set the route directions to occupy just a small portion across the bottom of the screen, half the screen (with the map still visible in the other half) or the entire screen. The route directions appear in a large bold font and are easy to see (but in traffic can be a definite







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All system have a 3 year labor & 1 year parts limited warranty.

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distraction ...). You can also access a text direction panel that gives turn-by-turn directions.

Pharos offers an extra cost web-based service called Smart Navigator, which includes four services. If you are at a public hotspot, you could use the GPS 525's built-in Wi-Fi radio to access the service, or Bluetooth to pair up with a data-capable cell phone and get online that way. In metro areas that have a Wi-Fi mesh blanketing large parts of the city, you could presumably access the service while on the move. I did not try this service, so the following descriptions are from the help screens on the GPS unit. Maps on Demand allows you to download a map from the Pharos website to the handheld if you didn't have the map CD or forgot to load that particular map before you left on your journey. Point of Interest Finder is what it sounds like. If you are in a new city, you can go online to find interesting places, restaurants, etc., and the mapping software will give you directions on how to get there from your current location. Real-time Traffic ties in with a city's traffic monitoring system and provides information about accidents, delays, road closures, etc. Follow Me is similar to a parcel tracking service that some courier companies use, except you use it to track your friends. It's an invitation-based service: you invite your GPS-equipped friends to join and the service keeps tabs on where they are.

## BlackBerry 8800

When I first read the announcement for the 8800, I was ready to trade in my Pearl. The main reason is because the Pearl has a built-in camera which I never use, while the 8800 has GPS, which I want. While the Pearl is a slim phone with a truncated keyboard, the 8800 is in the mold of the traditional BlackBerry – broader than a typical phone and with the signature full QWERTY thumb keyboard.

Just as the Pharos 525's foundation is a Windows Mobile device, the 8800 is at its heart a BlackBerry phone. It works on the GSM network, which in Canada means Rogers Wireless, and is also classified as a quad-band world phone designed to work on most other GSM networks around the world. For data communication, it supports high-speed EDGE networks.

Like other Blackberrys of recent vintage, the 8800 has loosened its business dress and includes some fun features like an MP3 player, video player and image viewer. It also includes a microSD memory card slot for additional storage. I popped a 2-gigabyte Kingston card into the unit, and had plenty of room for music, etc. When you plug the BlackBerry into a PC or Mac via the USB connection, the card is recognized as a drive, so it's a relatively painless process of dragging music from your computer hard drive to the BlackBerry's memory card. The 8800 ships with stereo earbuds, which

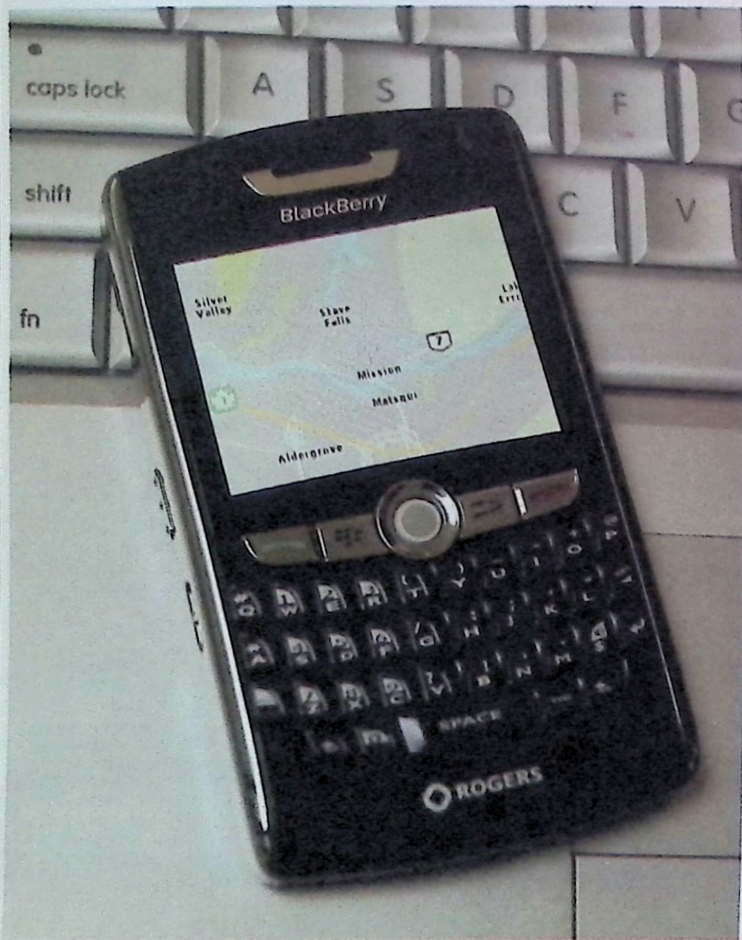
sound quite good. The earbuds also have a microphone and answer button, which allows you to interrupt the music to answer a call.

The built-in web browser is very responsive over the EDGE network. If you have a free email account, you can set up the BlackBerry browser to view this account, plus you can set up your POP mail account, or set up a BlackBerry push email account - a lot of options for staying in touch.

RIM has a service called BlackBerry Maps, similar to Google Maps in that lets you download maps to the BlackBerry. You can download a map of your present location, or a map from any address in your address book - which is quite slick. You can also plot a route between two points, which gives you turn-by-turn directions in a text file - this doesn't rely on the GPS radio and so can be used with non-GPS Blackberrys as well.

With the onboard GPS, you get another level of functions. Rogers Wireless and Santa Clara, California-based TeleNav Inc. announced a partnership in February to bring the TeleNav GPS Navigation System to Rogers customers (it costs \$10 a month with Rogers). The TeleNav system is what you need if you want to use the 8800 as an in-car navigation system. It brings the same kind of functionality to the BlackBerry that you would get with a built-in navigation system, including moving map views that are synchronized to your progress and text as well as voice-synthesized next-turn prompts - along with points of interest, etc. TeleNav also has a pedestrian mode for turn-by-turn directions while you are walking about.

By David Tanaka





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# Online vacation planning

## Don't believe everything you read

Just as it's done for real estate shopping, the Internet has removed much of the mystery from travel planning. For savvy bargain hunters, it's also opened the door to saving considerable dollars. The trick is to find the best avenues for your own personal needs.

Indeed, depending on your situation, you may not need the Internet at all. If, for example, you're headed for a destination with which you're not at all familiar, if you just don't have the time or the desire to get involved or if you're looking for an all-inclusive, full meal deal package, your friendly neighbourhood travel agent remains a viable option.

But if money is important (and to most of us it is), and if you don't mind a hands-on approach, there's a strong case to be made for do-it-yourself, Net-based trip planning. Sure, travel agents can offer discounts for the simple reason that they, in effect, buy in bulk. But those discounts are often offset by the even simpler fact that travel agents must make money somewhere. Moreover, they won't always have a deal with the airline and/or hotel you'd prefer, and they may not be able to go outside their comfort zone to set up precisely what you want. And finally, if you need only the lodging and/or just the airline ticket, chances are you can source an absolute rock bottom price just as easily as they can.

## Who do you trust?

But where do you turn first? If you need hotel advice, there's plenty of options online, running the gamut from professional to consumer-level. Can any of these reviews be fully trusted? Not always.

The pro sites generally assign just a single reviewer per establishment—someone who might not have the same priorities as you—and that review may already be a few months or years old. "User" review sites such as tripadvisor.com offer more opinions, but the final results can quite easily be skewed one way or another. If you're checking out Las Vegas, for example, you may run into people who've had a run of bad luck at the tables or despise the shrimp cocktails at a particular property, when none of that means anything to you. Still, if you take the time to understand the logic behind each review, you should get a good sense of what's right and what isn't.

So, what's next? If you initiate a simple Internet search of "Las Vegas vacation" or "Las Vegas hotels," you'll get, literally, millions of hits—predominantly third-party travel agencies and sites of questionable stature. Most won't save you any money at all, and many exist merely to rebroadcast standard rates, set you up in low-grade accommodations, or stick you with deals that seem too good to be true...and usually are. Few have any real buying power. Though they might save you time, that's their only advantage.

There are, however, a number of noteworthy exceptions. Some of the most popular, most reputable sites with Canadian operations include itravel2000.com, expedia.ca, travelocity.ca, and hotels.ca. All of them are easy to use, and all but hotels.ca, which deals only with accommodations, offer a full array of travel services, including flight, package, and even rental car information.

## Super sleuth

An even better bet is the new breed of metasearch travel websites such as kayak.com and sidestep.com. Unlike expedia and travelocity, these sites aren't mere travel agencies. They instead exist one level above online agents, acting essentially as travel-themed search engines, searching traditional travel sites, individual hotel websites, airline websites and much

more for the very best prices they can unearth. Covering more of the bases, metasearch sites should theoretically dredge up in a single search the same discount rates you could find yourself if you had oodles of spare time and the knowledge to know where to turn. We put kayak.com to the test and found that it consistently snagged better rates.

But if you really want to cut out all the middlemen, and if your dates are flexible and you don't mind putting in a little extra research and work, you can piece together a great vacation that's not only fully customized but surprisingly economical.

Let's stick with our Vegas theme. To really save the bucks, you'll want to start by heading directly to the authorized website of each of the hotels you're considering. The Bellagio, for example, can be found at bellagio.com, where you'll also uncover links for other Vegas properties owned by the MGM Mirage conglomerate, including the Mirage and Treasure Island. Here, you can check each website manually for current specials and use online calendars to determine availability.

More importantly, many sites allow you to sign up for email promotions. Most Vegas hotels and casinos have similar programs, as do many high-end lodgings throughout North America. From that point forward, the hotel in question will automatically email you specific dates if and when promotions become available.

## Leave no stone unturned

These dates often coincide with cancelled conferences and other group bookings. Truth is that rates can drop 50 percent or more during these periods. We've seen some Vegas rates plunge from \$225 to \$75, overnight. And these promotions aren't always limited to room price—many of them also include food and drink specials, no-charge suite upgrades, cut-rate spa or gym facility deals and even flight deals. Online travel agents and metasearch engines don't always pick up on specials such as these because they're often available for just a day or two.

You may even want to use the Internet as a glorified telephone book, and call the desired hotel to determine whether they can give you a better rate than they can offer on the Internet. They often can. And if you do opt for the phone, call the hotel directly rather than a central toll-free line—the people at the desk know about the most recent cancellations and are often authorized to give one-off discounts. And don't forget to mention car club affiliations, as many hotels offer CAA discounts.

As for transportation, those who have a few extra days may want to skip the airborne route entirely and instead hit the highway. Sure, the price of fuel is through the roof, but don't think you're not paying a little extra for your airplane seat for the very same reason. In any case, with resources such as mapquest.com and the Canadian Automobile Association (caa.ca) and its provincial affiliates to help plan your routes and stopovers, and then a little Internet sleuthing to source more information and dig up even better rates for the hotels/motels on route, driving has never been easier.

For flights, you'll first want to check the metasearch sites and online travel agents listed above. Then you should hit the individual airline sites, where you'll avoid the commissions and added fees of all-purpose sites and perhaps even take advantage of bonus frequent flyer points. Ask if they can match prices, and most certainly join any email promotion/specials program they might have.

Happy trails to you.

By Gord Goble



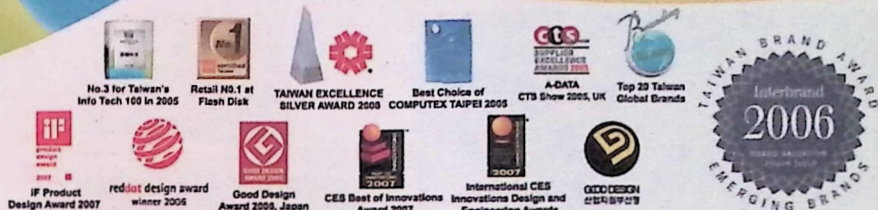


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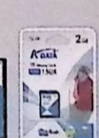
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# Wireless camping

Matches and marshmallows are important, but wireless technology really keeps the campers connected.

So we've all heard about the wireless municipality, but now comes word of the wireless campground. High speed Internet connectivity delivered through Wi-Fi is one of the fastest growing service add-ons that a campground or recreational vehicle park operator can offer nowadays.

A growing number of guests, residents and visitors at campgrounds and RV parks across the country want to be able to check personal and business information online once in a while. For longer term requirements, wireless can be even more important. For example, some travellers can stay for

weeks or months at a time in an RV park, while operating a home-based business or conducting other business-related activities from their home on wheels.

RV operators are becoming more responsive to the needs of their many high-tech guests. The best ones are savvy about dial-up versus high speed technology; sensitive to issues around privacy and confidentiality; and flexible with online scheduling and billing processes.

Costs for high speed access vary from campground to campground. Some owners will offer it as a free perk, designed to lure guests away from other parks and create loyalty among returning clientele. Some operators charge



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## The cellular walkie-talkie

People want to stay in touch with friends and family while on the road, using email or Instant Messaging. Even just among the camping party itself, push-to-talk phones and related wireless services (Bell and Telus are among those that offer such services) let you broadcast a message to everyone on your network. They're like walkie-talkies, and they can be very handy when you want to stay in close communication at the campground - but you aren't in each other's line of sight.

To take full advantage of high speed Internet services offered at a wireless hotspot location, you'll need a Wi-Fi enabled laptop or similar device, a Web browser and a wireless service or access plan, or a major credit card.

for the access time, reflecting their own investment and expense more directly. Still other operators are part of established, bulk-rate network service providers. Guests pay a fixed rate or monthly fee, and then they can connect at any park in the country that is on that network.

For RVers and campers alike, Campgrounds of America (KOA) is a well known and long-established recreational service provider, operating thousands of facilities throughout North America.

KOA wants to be the first system of family campgrounds to offer its customers wireless Internet right in the comfort of their own campsites. As such, the company has already launched KOA Konnect, becoming its own Internet Service Provider by installing Wi-Fi wireless, dial-up access and multiple points-of-presence (POPs) at its campgrounds across the U.S. and Canada.

More than 3,000 are now listed online, including one in nearly every province. From the sunny Okanagan Valley in beautiful BC to the banks of

the Sackville River in Nova Scotia, KOA wireless campgrounds can be found in some of our country's most popular destinations.

Even if not part of an established network or chain, individual campground and RV park operators are connecting to the wireless world. On Penikese Island, off the coast of BC, Port Browning's campground and marina has its own 802.11g hotspot, included in a tiered hookup price of \$22 per night. At the other end of the country, the Celtic Rendezvous campground in Newfoundland adds an unspecified additional charge for its hotspot connectivity (basic camping rate is \$25).

If you don't own an RV or if you aren't equipped for a major camping expedition, don't sweat it - destination marketing and mobile web operators are offering the high tech get away from it all experience as a service or rental offering!

For example, companies like Motor Homes Travel rent fully equipped RVs for the day, week or season. Meanwhile, travel operators such as KootenayRockies.mobi is online with its Wireless Application Platform (WAP), providing literally hundreds of pages of information about accommodation options, attractions, events and even restaurant menus for travelers equipped with some sort of wireless handheld device.

But no matter where the road takes you, no matter where you find yourself connecting to the Internet, security experts warn that public access Wi-Fi hot spots are potentially dangerous places for your computer - unless you take precautions.

Kind of like pitching a tent with zippered flaps, connecting a computer to the Internet wirelessly leaves you open and vulnerable. Not just your wireless communications, but your entire hard drive could be susceptible.

You'll want to ensure your device's internal safety and security measures are active and in place (network firewalls, password-protected files, encrypted transmissions, up-to-date anti-virus software and so on). Windows XP users should turn off the ad hoc mode, and any user should disable their PCs file sharing capabilities. Email encryption should be enabled as part of your digital asset protection.

Of course, you should protect your physical assets, too. Be aware of your surroundings, and be careful when and where you pull out your PC.

Hotspots are the ideal way to stay connected, no matter where you work or play. Wi-Fi hotspots provide high-speed Internet access where you need it most - at airports, hotels, convention centres, cafés and restaurant campgrounds and RV parks.

By Lee Rickwood

## Wi-Fi Camping in Canada and the U.S.

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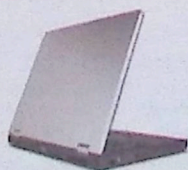
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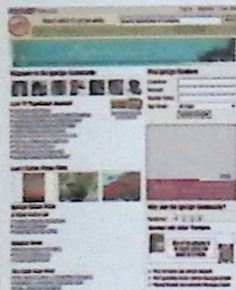
# Good-bye travel agent, hello traveller network

How much faith do you have in your fellow vacationer?

HUB checks out some of the web's most popular traveller networks. Sure, travel agents are a congenial lot, but you have to keep in mind they're out to make a buck. When it comes to planning that vacation you've spent the last year saving for, wouldn't you rather trust the honest opinions of your fellow travellers to tell you about good deals, fun places to go and little known sights to see?

That's the theory behind online traveller networks, websites that base their business on the popularity of tourists telling other tourists where to go and what to do on their trips. And, if the millions of vacationers who frequent these sites are any indication, there's something to it. We decided to take a look at a few of the top traveller networks on the Internet.

IgoUgo ([www.igougo.com](http://www.igougo.com))



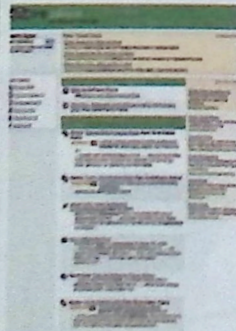
The IgoUgo community, which has amassed 350,000 members since the site launched seven years ago, allows users to find and connect with other travellers based on shared interests, from favourite trip destinations to preferred music. It's a great starting point for people new to the traveller network scene, providing access to user-generated information and tips in just a couple of clicks.

You can select locations from a world map to call up recent user reviews in categories

including experiences, restaurants, nightlife, things to do and hotels, then read and rate each post you view. We found member writing to be honest and intelligent. Still, if words don't do the trick you can skip over to the photo section and see shots snapped off by fellow travellers sorted by city, user and editor's picks.

On the subject of editor choices, each week IgoUgo's administrators post the 10 best travel deals they were able to scrounge up via their own online searches. The top deal on the site at press time was round trip airfare from several North American departure points to a number of Caribbean destinations for as little as \$207. Not bad.

TripAdvisor ([www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com))



The winner of the 2006 Webby award for best travel site, TripAdvisor regularly attracts more than 10 million visitors per week. The site's greatest appeal is a robust trip planner, a tool that allows travellers to book hotels and find inexpensive flights. While flight searches appear to be driven largely by advertisers, hotels are ranked according to TripAdvisor member reviews.

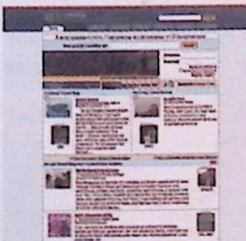
Speaking of members, the community portion of TripAdvisor has a database filled with tens of thousands of user reviews for popular destinations like Paris, London and Rome. Unfortunately, we found

wading through all of this data to be a bit of a drag. TripAdvisor requires users to enter key words to search user generated content, which proves much

less efficient than the topic categories provided by other sites we visited. Plus, results were sometimes cluttered with canned travel guide entries and advertisements mixed among authentic traveller authored items. And of the reviews we did find, many were simply rants about the terrible service encountered at this or that hotel or restaurant rather than balanced and insightful evaluations.

As a trip planner, TripAdvisor gets high marks, but it doesn't make the grade as a traveller network.

TravBuddy ([www.travbuddy.com](http://www.travbuddy.com))



Among the purest of online traveller networks, TravBuddy doesn't deal in flight finding or hotel hunting, but rather centres its attention on traveller-penned reviews and information.

More than any other travel site visited, we found the writing of TravBuddy users to be eloquent, genuine and impassioned. Most of the reviews and travel blog entries we read were posted

by experienced travellers who provided informed opinions on cultural cuisine, excellent tips on local customs and smart advice for finding good, cheap accommodations. TravBuddy members simply seem to be enamoured of travelling.

What's more, they're interested in hooking up with each other on trips. When you sign up for a TravBuddy account, you'll be asked if you're interested in meeting potential travel mates and whether you'd like to show other members around your hometown. Once a member, you can contact people travelling to your destinations, join groups with similar interests and comment on other members' reviews and blogs.

Travelling with strangers met online might sound a little scary, but TravBuddy has been operating for more than a year with no (reported) traveller hook-up mishaps to date.

By Chad Sapieha

## Three more traveller networks to try

VirtualTourist ([www.virtualtourist.com](http://www.virtualtourist.com)), established in 1999, is one of the oldest travel sites on the Internet. Like TripAdvisor, it provides access to powerful online vacation planning tools, but does a better job of maintaining a focus on meaningful, user authored reviews.

RealTravel's ([www.realtravel.com](http://www.realtravel.com)) main draw is a free travel blog that allows users to post text and photos as well as mark a path of travel on a map to let visitors track trip progress. A comment board provides a means of keeping in touch with friends and family. It's a terrific tool for backpackers and ad-hoc vacationers.

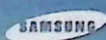
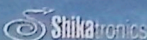
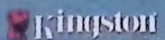
LonelyPlanet ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) is a travel book publisher, not a traveller network, but its website offers plenty of well informed personal opinions and stories via articles, podcasts and the official LonelyPlanet Blog, updated daily by hundreds of the company's travel-loving staffers.



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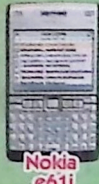
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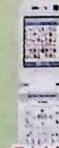
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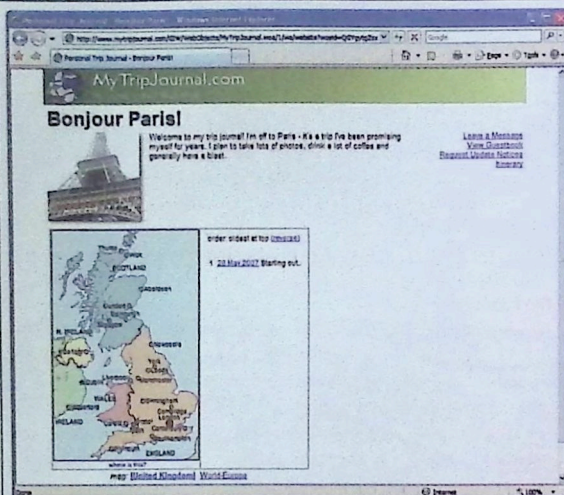


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# Share the journey



Sites like MyTripJournal.com provide a custom interface for you to create an online journal for your trip.

Spare a parting thought for those you leave behind as you head off on your summer vacation. Those of us left behind to slave away writing monthly columns or keep the home fires burning are interested in what you are doing and where you are. Luckily for us, you can document your travels using one of a range of online blogging services. These blogging services have sprung up like cheap European airlines, giving you cool tools to share your journey and even find and meet people as you travel.

One thing that sets these travel blog sites apart from a regular blog is that they are designed to make it easy for you to contribute to your blog on the road. Even if the only place that you can get access to them is a dialup connection in an Internet café – they'll be easy to use and geared to the things you'll be interested in doing. Some even provide handy traveller information, such as the location of Internet cafés and resources you can use as you are travelling.

One site that is popular with travellers is MyTripJournal.com. Here you can create a trip journal and provide a day-by-day description of what you're doing as well as an itinerary. The latter can be a handy resource for friends and family who want to know where you are going and where you will be. You can publish the information, give them the link and they can work the rest out for themselves.

MyTripJournal.com is free for up to 45 days and you can buy additional features, such as additional storage, additional time, no ads and the ability for your site to be private if you desire. The free service gives you up to eight

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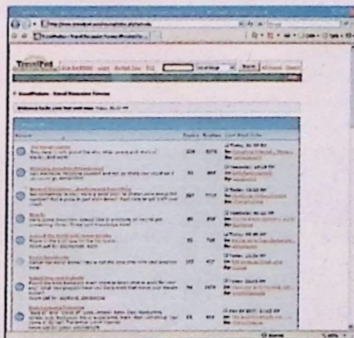


journal entries, 20 photographs, one Internet movie clip and a travel home page linking your trip journal.

Once you have signed up, customize the message and photo on your journal's home page and add a map that shows where you'll be. Then it's time to enter your itinerary, which you can do on a daily basis, and then create the first entry for your journal – this can include text, photos you've taken, a short movie clip and even markers on your maps. To share your trip with friends, invite them to follow your trip with you and later you can send them update notices.

MyTripJournal offers other handy features, such as the ability for friends and family to exchange messages with you by posting comments on your site. This way, you can communicate with them and share your experiences

as you go. They can visit MyTripJournal.com and search for you by name using the Find a Friend's Journal link. Having a site like this relieves you from the necessity of taking email addresses with you, from having to write individual emails and, worst of all, forgetting to stay in touch with someone important.



MyTripJournal.com lets you download a permanent archive of your trip when it is over. So, by creating a journal not only are you creating a resource for everyone to enjoy as you're travelling, but you also have an invaluable record of your trip at the end that you can use.

TravelPod.com is another popular and free travel journal website. Here you can not only journal your trip but you can also use the Find Travelers Near You link to locate people who are travelling in a similar area to you so that you can, perhaps, connect with them. This site also has good resources for travelling with technology – it provides you with good detail about how to travel with technology and how to blog while you are on the move.

Another travel journal option is to use a blog service such as Blogger or WordPad and to create a custom blog for your travel. Using a blog, you have the ability to manage the blog entirely yourself and you can include as much or as little information as you like on it. Of course, the downside is that you won't have all the features of a site like MyTripJournal, such as the custom itinerary and mapping options or the ability to handle your photos and video content. The flip side is that you won't be limited in the number of entries or photos and you have the freedom to do what you like – it's your blog.

Before you leave, find an online journaling site that suits your needs and set up your site so it's configured and ready to go. Remember to take the site's URL with you and don't forget your login and password as you'll need them to log in and update your journal.

By Helen Bradley

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# Bland bugs and boring buccaneers

CHAD SAPIEHA discovers that PC games based on two of the summer's biggest blockbusters are less memorable than the films that inspired them.

## Spider-Man 3

Publisher: Activision Developer: Beenox Studios

ESRB: T for Teen Rating: 2/5

My spidey-sense began tingling well before I booted up Spider-Man 3. Games based on Stan Lee's red and blue clad bug-man have a less distinguished pedigree than their film counterparts, and early reports of this latest game made it sound like little more than a clone of its predecessors—which, in fact, it turned out to be.

Much like Activision's previous titles featuring the wall-crawling do-gooder, Spider-Man 3 is a sandbox-style action adventure game. In other words, players get to swing around New York City, from the top of the Empire State Building to the window ledge of J. Jonah Jameson's office, doing anything they like along the way. Missions scattered around the city are indicated by floating icons and can be tackled in whatever order one chooses. Some are mandatory to progress the game's story, others are simply bonus quests meant to add value for gamers who just can't get enough web-slinging.

But I doubt many players will feel the need to explore the extra objectives. Indeed, I wasn't even able to muster up enough interest to finish all of the story missions. The game completely fails to capture the complexity of Peter Parker's character, and the narrative lacks any sort of cohesion. Even if you just stick to the mandatory missions, you'll likely find yourself wondering what some of them have to do with game's plot, much less the movie it's based on.



Worse, Spider-Man 3 just isn't much fun to play. The franchise's bland, button mashing combat was never great, and it hasn't been improved here. Spidey's moves are tricky to carry out and regrettably unrewarding—especially if you're trying to use a keyboard and mouse rather than a console-style gamepad. A finicky camera and slogging frame rate makes the experience even less bearable.

In the end, the only part of the game I derived any joy from was swinging and leaping through the city, seeing how fast I could fly and how high I could climb. But the pleasures of sailing through the Manhattan skyline aren't enough to make Spider-Man 3 worth recommending. The sad truth is that this particular Spider-Man just ain't that amazing.

## Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End

Publisher: Disney Interactive Studios Developer: Eurocom Entertainment

ESRB: T for Teen Rating: 3/5



Unlike Spider-Man 3, Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End for PC isn't a port of a game available for Xbox 360 and PlayStation3, but rather a copy of a completely different—and visually inferior—title developed for PlayStation2 and Wii that goes by the same name.

It seems odd that the PC should receive the uglier of the two versions, given that Windows machines have the potential to offer the best graphics of any gaming platform. It's also unfortunate, since the next-gen console edition does a great job of capturing the spectacle and atmosphere of the cinematic swashbuckling saga. Perhaps Disney Interactive simply wanted to make sure the game's specs didn't outclass the machines it presumed its target audience might own.

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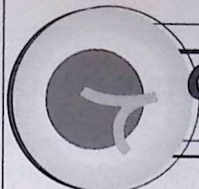


The plot of the PC version covers the whole of the last two movies, beginning with Cap'n Jack Sparrow's daring escape from an island dungeon and headlong charge through a pack of cannibalistic savages before moving on to events from At World's End.

Each mission is filled with standard hack 'n' slash swordplay mixed with a fair bit of item collection. A few mini-games are thrown in for good measure. On the surface, the game's design feels like it was meant for kids, but the themes are meant to entice a slightly older audience. The violence is a bit much for elementary schoolers, and there are comical allusions to sex and alcohol use. Unfortunately, this humour won't seduce many adult players; the writing is lazy, and voice cast is filled with so-so stand-ins.

But the greatest issue with the PC edition is its controls. There are several instances in the game in which a series of icons appear on screen representing keys the player has to tap in order for the hero to perform a contextual action. Miss one and you have to start all over again. The problem is that these icons—such as a sword (attack) or a pair of stick figures (grab)—don't immediately make one think of the lettered keys mapped to the commands they represent. I rarely managed to get through these sequences on my first try.

While Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End for Windows is a passable play for buccaneer devotees, most players will be better served grabbing the Xbox 360 or PlayStation3 editions—they're not much better games, but their superb graphics are worth a look-see.



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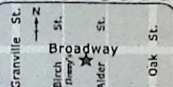
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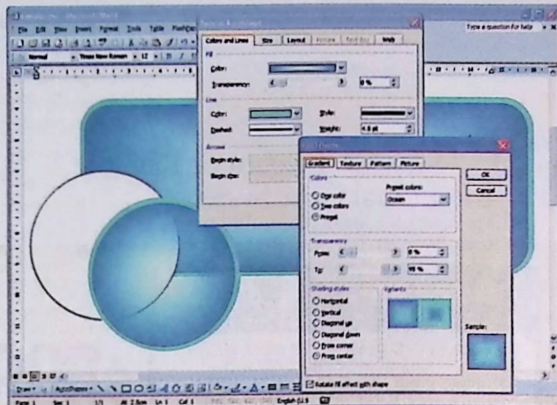
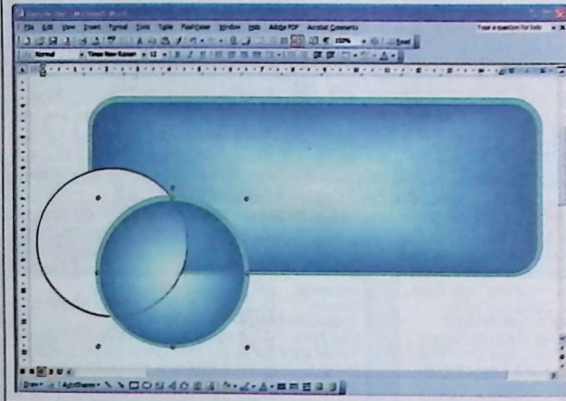


# Faux Smart Objects

Have you looked at Office 2007 and hankered after some of its new features? For me, it's the SmartArt objects - they can take a design from hohum to Wow! in a single step. SmartArt objects are dimensional boxes that you can use to illustrate step-by-step instructions or to display other information.

If you're using Office 2003, you aren't entirely left out of the loop. I've unearthed this cool technique to create dimensional objects to use to illustrate your Word documents and PowerPoint slides. In these steps, I'll use Microsoft Office Word 2003, but the same steps will work in PowerPoint and Excel 2003 and earlier versions of Office.

Open a new document in Word and display the Drawing toolbar by choosing View, Toolbars, Drawing. From the AutoShapes collection, select Basic Shapes, Rounded Rectangle and drag a rounded rectangle making it two thirds of the width of the page. Right click it and choose Format, AutoShape, Colors and Lines tab and then from the Fill Color dropdown list, choose Fill Effects, Gradient tab. Select the Preset gradient option and, from the preset colors list, choose Ocean. Set the transparency From value to 0 percent and the To value to 95 percent, and from the Shading styles select From Center and then the first variant which has the darker colour at the edges. Click Ok to close the Gradient dialog. From the Line Color dropdown list, choose a coordinating colour that is slightly different to the outside colour - for the Ocean gradient, the colour Aqua works well. Set the Style value to 4.5 points, set the Dashed value to a solid line and click Ok. You should see a



dimensional rectangle with a solid line border around it.

To create the circle to go on top of the shape, click the Oval tool on the Drawing toolbar. Hold the Shift key as you draw a circle to fit over the left edge of the rectangle. You'll need two of these circles, so hold the Control key and drag a second copy from the first. Select one circle, right click it, choose Format, AutoShape, Colors and Lines tab. From the Color dropdown list, choose White, set the Transparency to 0 percent, from the Line Color palette choose Black, set a thin line style and click Ok. Right click the second circle, choose Format, AutoShape, Colors and Lines tab. From the Fill Color dropdown list, choose Fill Effects, Gradient tab and configure the same gradient and settings as you used for the rectangle and the same Line color and style. Click Ok when you're done. This shape is partially transparent, so you'll use the white filled shape to mask it so you don't see the rectangle through the circle. To achieve this, position the coloured circle over the top of the white circle. If necessary, right click the white circle and choose Order, Send To Back to place it behind the coloured circle.

Click the Select Objects tool, drag over both circles, right click and choose Grouping, Group to make the two circles a single object. Drag the circle over the rectangle, select both objects using the Select Objects tool, right click and select Grouping, Group. To duplicate the shape, hold the Control key and drag a duplicate away from it. You can create multiples of this coloured shape or use different gradients to make different colours. To create a green shape, use the Moss preset gradient with a Lime colour line around the

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shape and for a brown/orange version, use the Mahogany preset gradient with a Tan line around it.

You can also create your own custom gradients for the colours you want to use. Once you've created your objects, save each as an AutoText entry so you can reuse it later on. To do this, select the shape, choose Insert, AutoText, New, type a name for the entry and click Ok. The rectangles can be rotated 90 degrees to appear either horizontal or vertical on the page. To add text over the shapes, create the text in a textbox and position it over the shape.

You can also add a photo over the circle shape by creating a circle using the

Oval tool, right click it and choose Format, AutoShape, Colors and Lines tab and, from the Fill Color dropdown list, choose Fill Effects, Picture tab and configure a photo to fill the circle with. Drag to position the photo filled circle over the circle in your custom shape.

While the effect isn't as simple to create and change as SmartArt in Office 2007, it is still relatively easy to make and the reward is that you can have some neat looking diagrams and information graphics even in Office 2003.

By Helen Bradley

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# Philips "sets" the mood

You've decided on an LCD over a plasma, measured the viewing distance in your room to determine your screen size, calculated your HDTV subscription costs and read a dozen "How-to set up an HDTV" guides. But with over 34 brands competing in the worldwide LCD market (according to Jonathan Cassell, iSuppli Corp.), many of them sharing identical parts from overseas suppliers, where do you begin when it comes to selecting a brand?

According to Patrick Pondaven, general manager of Retail Consumer Electronics at Philips Canada, there are three primary areas that differentiate one HDTV from another: the processor, the design, and in Philips' case – the lighting. The famous Ambilight line, launched by Philips in 2003, makes their mark obvious. These LCD and plasma televisions with illuminating bars located on the back of the set create a more intense viewing experience and help reduce eye strain.

Depending on the model, you can have a light emitting from just the right and left sides, the top as well, or from all four sides to create a "floating" effect. "Using the colour information provided by Active Control, the lights can actively match over 10 million on-screen colours or create 10,000 static colours including 6,500 degrees Kelvin," says Yulia Kovalchuk, marketing manager of Consumer Electronics at Philips Canada. (6500 degrees K is the colour temperature of natural daylight). There are two operating modes: one automatically adjusts the lighting colours to compliment the picture on your screen, while the other allows you to set one particular colour for a constant glow. There are also two speed settings: dynamic for those blockbuster movie nights, and relaxed for dosing off on the couch to late-night television.

While some refer to backlighting as gimmicky, the benefits of this feature go beyond simple colour coordination. Philips claims that Ambilight technology emits lighting designed to compliment both your programming and your vision. With appropriate lighting, your pupils don't need to excessively expand and contract as they would in a dark room, and this

significantly reduces your eye strain. Yes, you can strategically place lamps around your room or use a dimmer on your overhead, but nothing beats having a set that simply incorporates the right balance, height, and placement of light for you. There is also something to be said about setting the right mood, and complimentary lighting really does the trick.

Philips is introducing 15 new LCD HDTVs this year, all equipped with either 720p or 1080p native resolution; five of these incorporate Ambilight technology, with pricing starting at \$1299. Pondaven says speakers have improved enough that it no longer makes a difference whether they are placed on the sides or at the bottom of a set, so Philips merged the two right and left speakers into one horizontal bar below the screen, giving all models a sleeker appeal. The new models also feature the glossy piano black finish and come equipped all the inputs and outputs you would expect and/or need, including three HDMI inputs for high-def equipment. USB ports are also included for plugging in flash cards and listening to MP3s or watching JPEG slideshows. There is a memory card slot for quick access to Compact Flash, Memory Stick, SD, and Smart Media cards. The models are also Digital Cable Ready, and include a slot for a CableCARD. The Pixel Plus 3 HD processor enhances each pixel to create a sharper and more vivid picture, and the Clear LCD technology increases motion sharpness. (A quick tip on testing the sharpness of your screen, says Kovalchuk, is to watch a golf game and see whether you can clearly read the logo on the ball.) The new models are also more energy-efficient.

A good example of Philips' new branding strategy – keeping technology simple – is apparent in the settings assistant, which you use to set brightness, colour and contrast. One sample image is displayed on your screen, which is divided in half. For each setting, all you have to do is look at the picture and decide whether you like the left or right side better. No lingo, no bars, no numbers. Just look at it.

Complimenting the simplicity of Ambilight design is the Ambisound SoundBar: a single unit, five amplifier speaker that produces multi-channel surround sound. The SoundBar measures 37" wide and is designed to sit discreetly below your set. You have the option of resting it on a table or mounting it to the wall, and hardware for both is included. The obvious benefit here is the lack of multiple speakers and their wires running all over and around your room, while keeping the same quality sound as a 5.1 channel system.

The SoundBar has a built-in DVD player, which plays most formats out there including Video CD/SVCD, DVD+R/-RW and DVD-R/-RW. The player will upscale to 720p, 1080i, or 1080p. Philips is still waiting for Blu-ray technology to improve before adding it to the SoundBar and would prefer to keep the unit at a reasonable cost. (The SoundBar is currently priced at \$999; a high-def player would significantly raise this price.)

Other features of note include USB Direct, which allows you to plug in your USB flash drive to listen to music files (MP3 and WMA) and view photos, an integrated AM/FM tuner, and an MP3 line-in for connecting your MP3 player. An iPod dock is also included (with adapters for various models) so you can view content directly on your TV. The Smart Sound feature automatically detects audio encoding and adjusts your surround settings accordingly, so you don't have to fuss around every time you go back and forth between listening to stereo music and watching a DVD.

By Jennifer Kaur





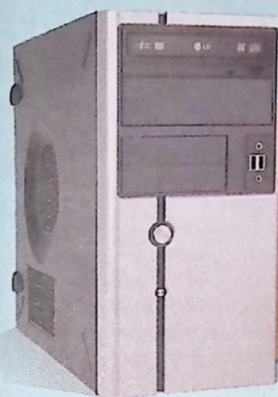


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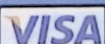
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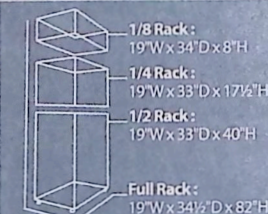
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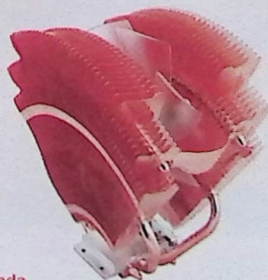




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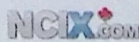
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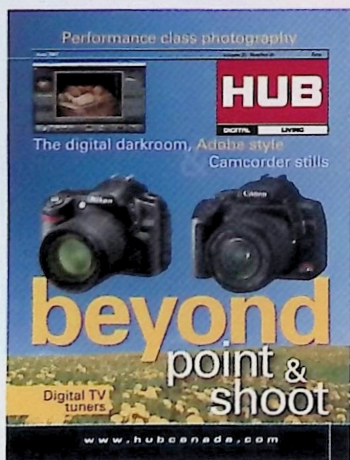
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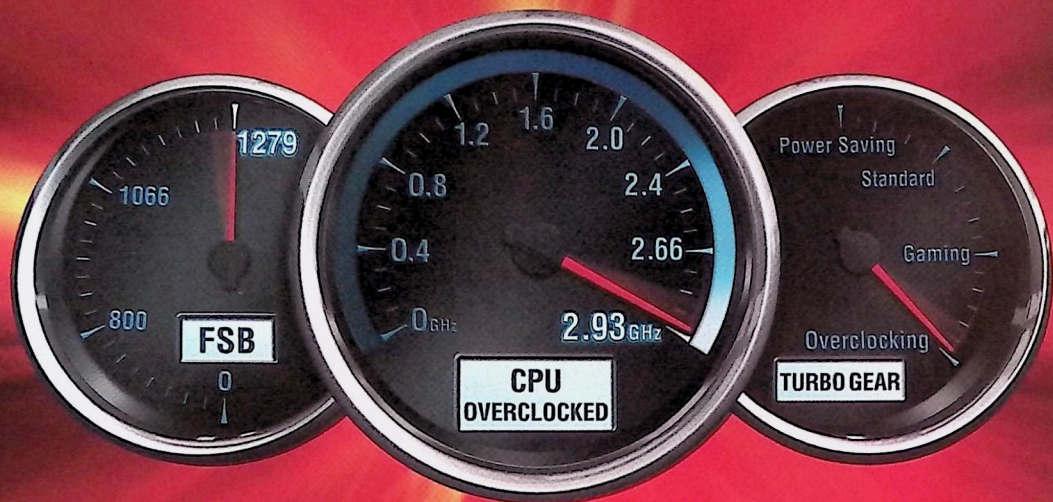
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